

## READING BABY'S CUES

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### ***WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT READING BABY CUES?***

Perception, Accurate Interpretation, appropriate response

- Sensitivity to baby's cues is the origin of parent-infant attachment
- We must recognize our unique baby's body language
- We must respond appropriately to what baby is saying

### **Baby language: Crying is not the only form**

- Facial expressions: smiling, frowning, looking puzzled, scared
- Body language: relaxed, squirming, pulled up, tight, rigid,
- Hands: fisted, open, grasping, reaching, splayed, flailing, pushing
- Mouth: crying, sucking, cooing

### **What do babies need?**

▫ Food ▫ Touch ▫ Interaction ▫ Sleep ▫ Shelter

### ***HOW DO WE LEARN TO INTERPRET BABY BEHAVIORS?***

- Culture
- Majority belief = Norm
- Our culture defines normal through the lens of bottle-feeding
- Acquisition of Parenting stages
- The influence of authority figures
- We may trust a person who seems to know more than us even when it goes against our gut
- Some authority figures are humble and open, while others presume to know all and abuse that position
- Influence of parenting books

### ***THE ACQUISITION OF THE PARENTAL ROLE***

#### **Anticipatory Stage**

- Find out everything they can through observation, discussion w/ friends & family, classes, books

#### **Formal stage**

- Want the RULES
- No knowledge
- The Authority
- Check EVERYTHING

### **Informal stage**

- Relax rigid rules
- Recognize not everything the “experts” say is correct

### **Personal Stage**

- Having the ability to integrate authoritative sources and personal intuition
- Developing your own style

### **Where do these fit in?**

- Some parenting books become The Authority and teach parents to look to the book for the proper interpretation

### ***OUR CULTURE DEFINES NORMAL THROUGH THE LENS OF BOTTLE-FEEDING***

- How much they should drink
- How long they should sleep
- How they should grow
- How to hold them
- How to soothe them

### **But we need to look for normal *through the lens of the breastfeeding infant***

- Bottle-feeding should imitate breastfeeding, breastfeeding should not imitate bottle-feeding!
- If you can read a puppy, you can read a baby. *BUT...* we may not afford a baby the same respect we give to a new puppy, for fear of establishing "bad habits" like co-sleeping. ~Diane Wiessinger~

### **Behind the 8-ball from birth...**

- Labor drugs can affect neurobehavioral functioning
- Higher neurobehavioral functioning = better breastfeeding behaviors
- Better breastfeeding behaviors elicit better responses from mothers

*Understanding when a baby may be affected can help parents to reprogram their thinking*

### ***COMMONLY MISINTERPRETED BABY BEHAVIORS***

#### ***We need to remember:***

- The influence of birth factors on infant behavior
- What parents hear or say
- What messages parents internalize
- What's REALLY going on?

### **Sleepy baby the first week**

#### **What mothers hear:**

- "He's such a good baby!"
- "Never wake a sleeping baby"

#### **What's *really* going on:**

- Not eating often enough because of labor meds, feeding schedules, jaundice



### **Baby quickly falls asleep at breast**

#### **What mothers hear:**

- "She's just not hungry
- "She's just too tired"
- "She's just lazy"

#### **What's *really* going on:**

- Baby has "checked out" because breastfeeding isn't working
- Lack of milk flow



### **Baby nursing "all the time"**

#### **What mothers hear or say:**

- "He's using you/me for a pacifier"
- "You/I can't be doing *that* all the time!"

#### **What's *really* happening:**

- Baby not getting enough to eat due to inefficiency or lack of available milk so he keeps waiting for more
- Too tired to keep trying.... Tongue-tie, low tone, etc
- High sucking need
- Not feeling good- needs comfort



### **Baby bounces on and off breast**

#### **What mothers may *say*:**

- "My baby doesn't like breastfeeding"
- "My baby doesn't want the breast"

#### **What mothers may *hear*:**

- "He's just playing around"
- "He's just messing around"
- "We can't allow that"
- "You're torturing him"



**What's *really* happening?**

- Baby is trying to say, "This doesn't feel right" or "I can't figure this out."
- Baby is overwhelmed
- "I can't breathe"
- "I can't keep up"
- "This isn't working right for me yet"

**Breast refusal**

**What mothers may say:**

- "My baby doesn't like the breast anymore"
- "I feel like my baby doesn't like me"
- "My baby doesn't like breastfeeding"
- "He sure is stubborn, isn't he?"
- "My baby is grossed out by my milk"

**What mothers hear:**

- "Boy, he sure has a temper!"
- "You're gonna have your hands full with *that* one!"
- "It's time to let her cry it out"



***CHANGING PERSPECTIVES***

- Pre-emptive prenatal education helps
- Explain the behavior from baby's point of view
- Role model by interacting with baby
- Remember that when baby has had a bad experience, he needs time to build trust and erase those memories
- Teach them Reality
- Mother and baby must learn to trust each other
- Role modeling by action
- Teach /Learn coping skills

**Getting a frustrated baby to breastfeed**

- When baby is upset and crying, *he will also tell you if and when he is ready to come back and try again*
- First he often reaches a high pitch as he expresses his frustration
- Then the timber starts to come down- "un huh, un huh, un huh....."
- Offering the breast too soon will upset him even more and be unsuccessful
- Try skin to skin & baby-led attachment

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Rose, Marion Badenoch. Reading the Cues: How to respond to baby's cries.  
[http://www.instinctiveparenting.com/flex/reading\\_the\\_cues\\_how\\_to\\_respond\\_to\\_babys\\_cries/165/1](http://www.instinctiveparenting.com/flex/reading_the_cues_how_to_respond_to_babys_cries/165/1)
- Understand Your Baby's Cues. <http://www.babyart.org/newborn/understand-your-babys-cues.html>
- PBS Parents. Reading Your Baby's Cues <http://www.pbs.org/parents/earlylearning/babycues.html>
- Klaus, Marshall and Phyllis. The Newborn's Six states of consciousness.  
[http://parenting.ivillage.com/newborn/0,,lz\\_6qvd,00.html](http://parenting.ivillage.com/newborn/0,,lz_6qvd,00.html)
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